

Earthquake 2005  
ten years later

# Waiting on the Faultline

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Omar Asghar Khan Foundation

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## Omar Asghar Khan Foundation

A public advocacy organization helping build a state responsive to its citizens. It seeks to strengthen the resilience of citizens – particularly the most vulnerable – so that they can claim their rights from the state, counter violent extremism, and reduce the burden of poverty. The Foundation works across Pakistan, with its strongest field-base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has offices in Islamabad and Abbottabad.

## 8:50 am, 8th October 2005

At 8:50 am on 8th October 2005 a violent 7.6 magnitude earthquake wreaked havoc in parts of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The devastation was beyond imagination in an area that was already suffering from extreme poverty. More than 70,000 people perished and as many were seriously injured. About 3.5 million were left without shelter and over half a million houses flattened. An estimated 6,000 schools, 800 health facilities, 6,400 km roads, and 50-60 percent of water supply, sanitation, telecommunication and power infrastructure was affected in an area spread across 30,000 sq. km of mostly mountainous terrain<sup>1</sup>. Behind these faceless statistics are heartrending stories of broken communities, shattered dreams, and lives that would never be the same again.



As a nation reeled in shock, the government appeared clueless. It was left wringing its hands, ruing its inability to respond. It failed to provide the first and most important lifesaving post-disaster response of search and rescue. Agonizing images of family and friends clawing their way through concrete and other debris searching for their loved ones will always remain a painful, indelible memory. Unforgettable is also inspiring humanity of those in distress. Many mourning unthinkable losses also extended a helping hand to others in sorrow. Together they started picking up the pieces, overcoming grief and restoring some semblance of order to their world that lay scattered before them.



The government was not even capable of providing desperately needed, timely relief. It trailed behind ordinary citizens who sprung into action, within hours gathering and delivering relief goods. Cash and in-kind donations poured in from everywhere. Scores of people came personally to help in whichever way possible. Teams of doctors arrived to treat the injured; students came to deliver relief goods to remote areas; and individuals volunteered to help out. The swift, selfless and unconditional generosity of citizens from across Pakistan and beyond shone a beam of hope in the overbearing gloom of death, destruction and government dysfunction.





## Government response

Two weeks into the disaster, government actions appeared. On 24 October 2005, an ordinance was passed and the Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) was set up. A dedicated organization created ostensibly like a hare capable of outpacing the glacial tortoise of mainstream government. It soon sprouted tentacles. A Provincial Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (PERRA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in Azad Jammu & Kashmir a State Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Agency (SERRA) emerged. District Rehabilitation Units (DRUs) were also set up, staffed and equipped. A mammoth parallel bureaucracy took roots. It was run by a mix of military and civilian personnel, best described as an awkward couple devoid of chemistry.

External agencies engaged to assess damages confirmed the worst-affected districts were Abbottabad, Mansehra, Battagram, Shangla and Kohistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and, Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Neelum and Rawlakot in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. An army of consultants and technical experts were put to work. A rehabilitation plan divided into 12 sectors was drawn up and its cost estimated at a colossal US\$5.2 billion. An impressive donor conference was held on 19 November 2005 at which external support of US\$6.2 billion was pledged – celebrated as a huge victory as promised funds surpassed required resources.

Two months into the disaster, the government appeared determined and clear-sighted. It had a new fast-track institutional machine, a detailed reconstruction plan and pledged funds. So what went wrong?



Then President Pervez Musharraf with former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Donor Conference, Islamabad

## 2015: ten years later....

Ten years after the disaster, why are schoolchildren still waiting for reconstruction of their schools? Why are patients waiting for rebuilt BHUs? Why are people living in areas condemned as red zones still waiting for a clear policy? Why did people simply move on, tired of waiting for new jobs?



Balakot then (*left*) and now (*below*): earthquake survivors picked up the pieces of their shattered lives and moved on, themselves



At the ten-year milestone in the long and arduous journey to rebuild homes and lives devastated by the 2005 earthquake it is time to take stock. It is time for accountability. It is time to stop the waiting.



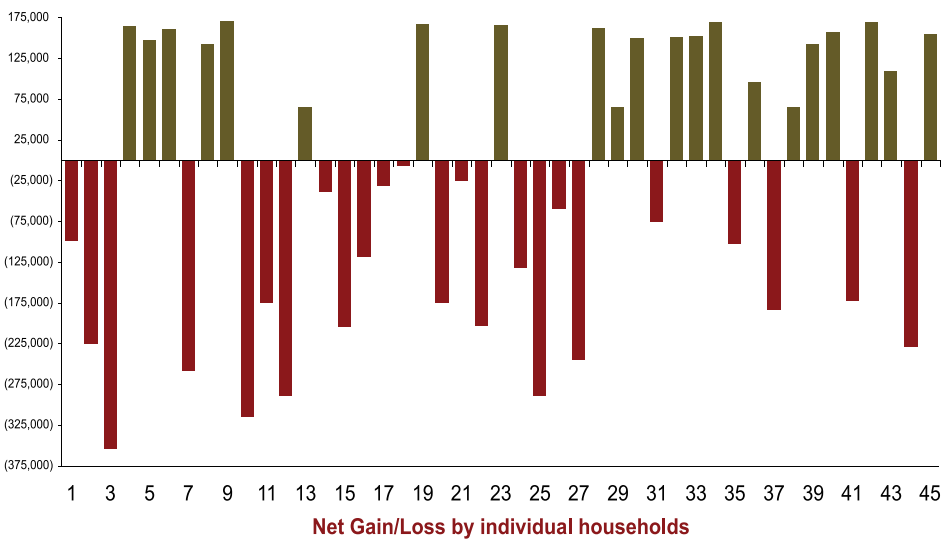
**House reconstruction:** The government started off on the right foot. It prioritized house reconstruction, as people urgently needed shelter. Wisely, a subsidy for house reconstruction was offered, giving a helping hand to owners rather than constructing houses for them. The government appeared to have learnt from the bitter experience of the 2004 South Asian tsunami. Multiple governments of the fourteen affected countries had made the mistake of building houses to replace those upended by the towering tsunami waves. But constructing houses for hundreds of thousands was too slow, in some places too costly, with corruption inescapable in large-scale procurement of materials.

Pakistan dodged the mistakes made in South Asia. But made new ones. The size of subsidy the government offered was hopelessly inadequate and its conditional disbursement was painfully slow and cumbersome. It all started with a universal survey. More than 600,000 houses were surveyed over a period of about two years: 2006-07. If surveyors declared a house completely destroyed (CD) the owner was eligible for a subsidy of Rs.175,000 and if partially damaged (PD), the owner got Rs.75,000. Houses with negligible structural damage were labeled NSD, and were ineligible for subsidy.

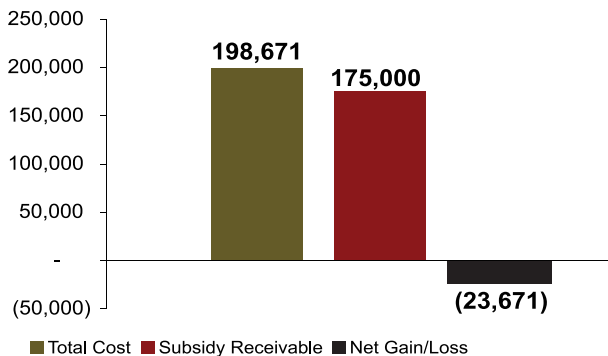
To access subsidy, eligible claimants had to rebuild their houses in phases strictly following the government prescribed design. With the initial Rs.75,000 of the subsidy the CD claimant completed plinth construction. Then waited for another survey to assess if it was according to given designs. If approved, the third tranche of subsidy could be accessed through bank transfers. Next was lintel level construction, which again had to be surveyed and okayed before the final tranche of the subsidy could be released.

Data collected by the Omar Asghar Khan Foundation in 2006-08 showed that even if house-owners got the full subsidy, the cost of accessing it was often prohibitive. Expenses were incurred on transport and documentation as claimants chased government officials and banks for funds. Some also reportedly paid bribes from petty amounts to Rs.25,000 paid to survey teams at different stages of inspection. Adding out-of-pocket expenses with opportunity cost showed that the subsidy was not worth the effort to access it.

Shadowing randomly selected 45 claimants, the Foundation showed that even if the entire subsidy amount of Rs.175,000 was accessed, it cost the claimant Rs.198,671, i.e., a net loss of Rs.23,671. These figures do not include monetized anxiety of house-owners who were already struggling with the aftermath of one the worst natural disasters this region has experienced.

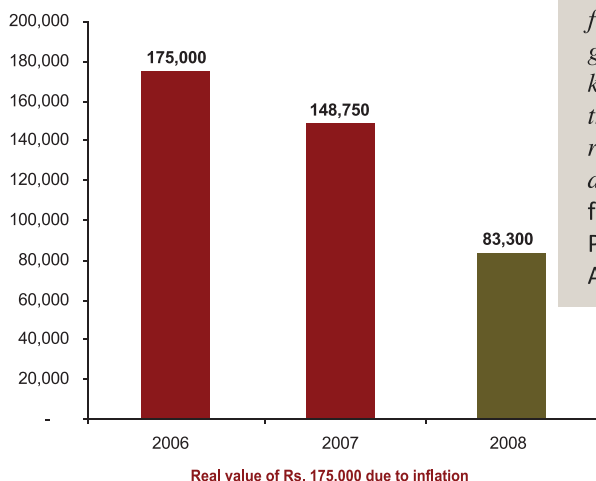






The delays caused by the tedious conditional disbursement also reduced the real value of the subsidy. The Foundation's research showed that if a house-owner was lucky enough to access the full subsidy within two years, i.e. by 2008, its real value was reduced to half due to inflation. Ten years later, the subsidy is probably too little, much too late. According to ERRA, as of February 2015 there are still 5 per cent claimants who have not yet received the full subsidy.

*“Omar Asghar Khan Foundation’s action research was exceptionally helpful in changing government’s policies on post-disaster assistance. For example, following the 2010 floods the government decided to give cash grants instead of any kind of conditional support like the subsidy for house reconstruction. This was possibly due to the Foundation’s work,”* former Director General, Provincial Disaster Management Authority, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.





Zarifan bibi lived in District Mansehra with her two sons. Her husband, Javed, worked in a flourmill in Havelian. The earthquake killed her younger son and injured the older.

Zarifan bibi used the Rs.100,000 received as compensation for her younger son's death to treat the older injured son. She also took a loan of Rs.80,000. Her husband returned home after the earthquake resulting in an estimated loss of income of Rs.96,000.

Javed accessed the first two tranches of subsidy after incurring expenditures on documentation and other formalities. He died in December 2007. Zarifan bibi now had to transfer the subsidy claim from her deceased husband to herself.

Delays in the transfer forced her to take another loan of Rs.35,000 to rebuild her house to the lintel level. Her only surviving son died in March 2008. Zarifan bibi was left alone, heavily indebted, and homeless.

Surviving on the Faultline, Omar Asghar Khan Foundation, 2008

Razzaq worked as a tailor in Islamabad, with a monthly income of Rs.12,000. His wife, six daughters and four sons, lived in a small mountain village in District Abbottabad. The earthquake demolished his house. An NGO provided CGI sheets that Razzaq used to construct a makeshift shelter. He also bought household utensils worth Rs.1,000. Razzaq's destroyed house was among 180 houses "missed" by the initial survey. He went with delegations to Abbottabad demanding inclusion of missed houses and the first installment of Rs.25,000. These visits cost Rs.5,000.

Razzaq's house was included in the second survey after he allegedly paid Rs.5,000 as a bribe. He opened a bank account with Rs.2,000 and spent another Rs.3,000 in repeated trips to the bank to check on receipt of the second installment. Many weeks passed but the funds did not arrive. Razzaq went to the ERRA office in Abbottabad and spent two days waiting in queues. When his turn finally came, he was told that ERRA's records did not include his case, which was categorized as "no record." He filled more forms and returned home after spending Rs.2,000.

For the next two months he made repeated inquiries. He went back to ERRA in Abbottabad, and found out his case was transferred to PERRA in Peshawar for correction. The visit cost another Rs.1,000. More weeks passed. Razzaq started pursuing PERRA in Peshawar. He made five visits to Peshawar costing Rs.8,000. On the fifth visit, he was informed that his case was sent to ERRA in Islamabad. Razzaq made six trips to ERRA Islamabad – incurring a total cost of Rs.11,000. In March 2007 he got the second installment of Rs.75,000 and build the plinth. In April 2007, it was inspected and certified after payment of Rs.5,000. For the next three months Razzaq waited for the next installment, and made more followup trips to Abbottabad, Peshawar and Islamabad, at a cost of Rs.16,000. In December 2007, he received the third installment of Rs.25,000 to which he added Rs.50,000 taken as a loan to construct his house to the lintel level. After paying another Rs.5,000 bribe, the lintel was certified. In June 2008, he got the final Rs.50,000.

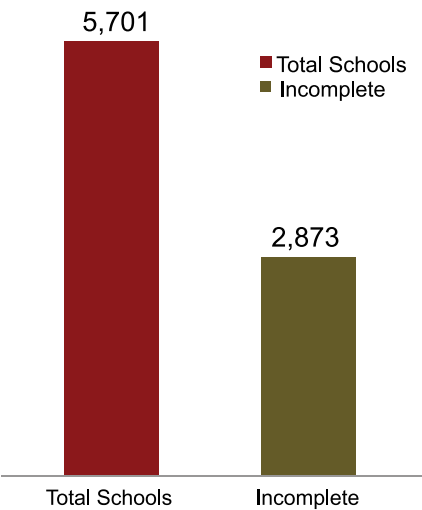
Razzaq's relentless pursuit over 32 months yielded Rs.150,000 which cost him nearly Rs.70,000. His lost Rs.384,000 in income and had loans of Rs.50,000 to repay.

Surviving on the Faultline, Omar Asghar Khan Foundation, 2008



**Education:** According to ERRA, as of February 2015, out of 5,701 schools to be reconstructed, a staggering 2,873 are still not complete.

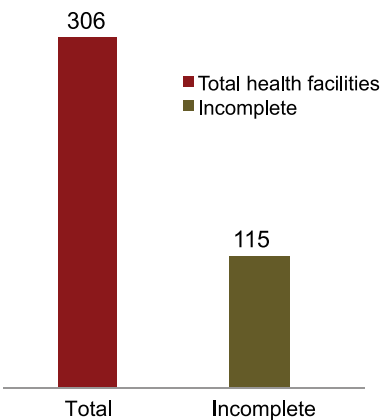
The sorry statistics on schools includes the government primary school in Battagram's village Kolay. People of the village claim a tender for reconstructing the school was issued around 2007 and four walls were erected in 2009. Nothing has happened since. Abandoned, the incomplete structure is used as a cattle pen. A tiny pre-fabricated box was given as a temporary school structure. Small and suffocating it is equally spurned by students and teachers, who prefer to hold classes under open skies. The story of this rural school is not dissimilar to too many more. The tragic twist to the tale is that the earthquake had only marginally damaged many of these schools. Yet the government razed their structure to the ground with the promise to build back better.





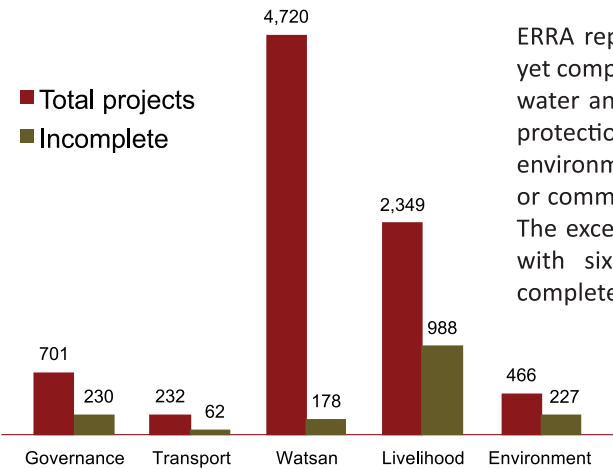
**Health:** Figures on reconstructing health-care facilities are also dismal. Out of the planned 306 facilities 115 are yet to be reconstructed. Failure to rebuild these facilities despite a passage of ten years is denying healthcare to people that were poor even before the 2005 earthquake unleashed further deprivation.

Mystifyingly some figures don't even add up. According to the government's damage assessment data the earthquake affected 800 health facilities. Then why are only 306 being reconstructed? What about the other 494 health facilities? The numbers in education also do not match but show a smaller gap. About 6,000 schools were assessed as damaged and 5,701 schools are being rebuilt, leaving 299 unaccounted schools.



### Job not yet done

ERRA reports confirm projects are not yet complete in every sector: transport, water and sanitation, livelihood, social protection, power and telecom, environment, watershed management, or community livelihood rehabilitation. The exception is medical rehabilitation with six planned projects that are complete.



## Disaster institutions survive, multiply

Despite its failure to fast-track or finish rehabilitation, ERRA and its tentacles continue to survive. The purpose of maintaining these structures at taxpayers expense is not clear.

Compounding survivors' miseries is a frustrating institutional muddle. When they ask the DRU about their school reconstruction, the officials on duty claim the DRU is out of funds and that it does not implement projects. When people turn to mainstream government, they are told earthquake rehabilitation is ERRA's domain. Tossed around, survivors of the 2005 earthquake are desperately looking for a sign that tells them: the buck stops here.

Doomed to repeat mistakes, a new institutional layer has been added to respond to disasters. In 2010, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was created followed by its provincial and district counterparts, with plans reportedly under consideration to also have tehsil-level presence. The need for disaster management in vulnerable countries like Pakistan can hardly be overstated. But whose job is it anyway?

- Should the NDMA be responsible for enforcing codes that make buildings earthquake-safe?
- Isn't it better to strengthen emergency response forces like Rescue 1122 to provide swift search and rescue assistance?
- Shouldn't disaster preparedness be integrated into development planning to make Pakistan more resilient?

There may still be a role for institutions like NDMA. But it must be shaped from lessons offered by ERRA-PERRA-SERRA that failed the survivors of the 2005 earthquake.

## Public rehabilitation budgets: calls for accountability

After ten years, to whom should the earthquake-affected people turn? Which door should they knock? Is anyone listening? A glimmer of hope briefly flickered when Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's budget for FY2014-15 included an allocation of Rs.300 million for reconstructing 760 schools destroyed by the 2005 earthquake. But it turned into dismay as figures in FY2015-16 showed the provincial government had failed to expend more than Rs.4.1 million, i.e., nearly 99 per cent of the allocated Rs.300 million remained unspent.

Tracking provincial budgets is possible. But what about off-budget rehabilitation funds? How much of the pledged US\$6.2 billion in external assistance was received? How much was spent, on what? Is there any balance? Many questions abound. Perhaps the Public Accounts Committee or NAB can help get some answers. Also seeking answers are hundreds of thousands of school-going children, like the ones in village Kolay. Their question is simple:



## What next?

As we mark the tenth barsi of a disaster that will forever haunt us, we will no doubt remember those who lost their lives on 8th October 2005. Let us also not forget those who survived. Like the people of Balakot who perhaps long ago stopped waiting for relocation to the safer New Balakot City, a promise that is wasting, away from the faultline.



## Citizen Charter of Demands

- All incomplete schools, healthcare facilities, and other projects must be completed before 8th October 2016.
- Reconstructing public services destroyed by the 2005 earthquake should be given priority by the provincial and state governments.
- A clear policy on areas marked as red zones must be formulated in consultation with affected people.
- The New Balakot City should either be completed or totally abandoned – with apologies to the people of Balakot who were promised this new “city of hopes.”
- Provincial and state budgets for reconstruction should also receive fiscal transfers from the center.
- ERRA and its sub-units must be immediately disbanded and its offices and equipment transferred to provincial and state governments.
- A complete audit must be done of all rehabilitation funds received and expended by ERRA and its sub-units, and its findings must be made public.

